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published in
Journal of Consumer Culture
2006

DOI (link to publisher)
10.1177/1469540506060866

document version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Journal of Consumer Culture

ARTICLE

The Development of Consumption Culture and the Individualization of Female Identity

Fashion discourse in the Netherlands 1880–1920

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Abstract. This article investigates how the arena of fashion, as an example of consumption culture, has been an important locus of female individualization. Individualization is defined in a Foucauldian manner as the process by which human beings are channelled into individuals. From the mid-19th century onwards, the subject of 'individualization' has been a central theme in sociological, historical and anthropological thought. It is striking how, even now, leading commentators are addressing the issue in gender-blind terms. Feminist scholars have therefore criticized the mainstream debate about individualization, arguing that women have been excluded from the western development of individualization. This article will sustain the point of view that while women have been banned from 'masculine' processes of individualization, they have at the same time been involved in many 'other' – often trivialized – developments of individualization. Modern phenomena such as consumption culture and fashion are examined as important arenas of female individualization. The argument is supported by an analysis of Dutch fashion magazines at the turn of the 19th century (1880–1920). The analysis highlights how the editorials taught women to conceive of themselves as 'modern' individuals free to choose and be aware of themselves as unique and self-determining persons.

Key words
consumption culture • fashion • feminist theory • individualization

(London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi)
Vol 6(1): 87–115 1469-5405 [DOI: 10.1177/1469540506060866]
www.sagepublications.com

INTRODUCTION

This article will examine how consumption culture, and fashion in particular, contributed to the individualization of female identity. Individualization is defined in a Foucauldian manner as the process by which human beings have been channelled into 'individuals'.

In his well-known essay on fashion, Georg Simmel (1904) points to the individualizing opportunities of fashion for women. Simmel argues that fashion is, on the one hand, a means of expressing one's place within a social group, and on the other hand a means of 'individual accentuation of personality' (Simmel, 1904: 309). For Simmel, fashion was the only sphere in which a woman could exercise her individuality; this freedom was denied her in other social spheres. In fashion theory the linking of fashionable appearance and individual identity has become a cliché that has mostly been presented in ahistorical, gender neutral and almost essentialist terms. An interesting exception to these ahistorical theories is the work of Joanne Entwistle (2000, 2001), which approaches fashion as a bodily situated practice. However, as I shall argue later on in this article, her attempt to situate this phenomenon as culturally and historically specific remains ambivalent.

In recent consumption theory, the linkage of individualization and consumer culture has been made several times. According to McCracken (1988: 20), 'the connection between consumption and individualism, largely wrought in the eighteenth century, is one of the great cultural fusions of the modern world.' This linkage of consumption and individualization has also been stressed by Don Slater (1997: 31) in his book *Consumer Culture & Modernism*:

> the eminently modern notion of the social subject as a self-creating, self defining individual is bound up with self-creation through consumption: it is partly through the use of goods and services that we formulate ourselves as social identities and display these identities. This renders consumption as the privileged site of autonomy, meaning, subjectivity, privacy and freedom.

In this article, I will analyse how this intertwining of consumption and individuality has been brought into being by means of concrete techniques in the mundane everyday lives of women. Moreover, I will stress the gendered character of this modern fusion. Consumption culture and fashion were (and to some extent still are) feminine domains *par excellence*. Although fashion theory has recently shown that 'the great masculine

renunciation' that occurred at the end of the 18th century has been greatly exaggerated (Breward, 1999, 2001), it does not lessen the fact that consuming as a social activity has been allotted to women in the first place and that there has been a long tradition in western culture of associating fashion and consumption with femininity (Entwistle, 2000; Tseëlon, 1997). In my view fashion (or consumption more generally) has not only become a means to express female individuality but a means to construct female individuality by concrete individualizing techniques. To support my argument I will analyse fashion discourse at the turn of the 19th century. Fashion discourse was (and still is) a paradigmatic articulation of consumption culture.

INDIVIDUALIZATION: A FOUCAULDIAN AND GENDERED APPROACH

From the mid-19th century onwards, the subject of 'individualization' has been a central concern of disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and history. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, sociologists such as Durkheim, Weber and Simmel addressed the growing importance of the individual in fast-changing western societies. Both Durkheim and Simmel saw the division of labour as one of the main processes behind increasing individualization (Durkheim, 1898; Simmel, 1900, 1908). Moreover, Simmel (1903) also focused on the paradoxical character of modern societies: the more impersonal and abstract the societies, the more people feel the need to individualize themselves by eccentric or capricious behaviour. While Durkheim and Simmel were able to see the liberating potentials of increasing individualization, Max Weber was much more negative about what he saw as modern society's tendency to threaten rather than foster individuality. The decision-making, morally responsible individual is, for Weber, a specific modern and Occidental type of personality resulting from a unique combination of preconditions. However, Weber believed that the freedom of the responsible individual will be undermined by the rationalized forces endemic to late capitalist and bureaucratic societies (Gerth and Wright Mills, 1991: 70–74).

Today, contemporary social theorists such as Giddens, Bauman and Beck, to name just a few, are reconsidering the 'individualization' theme. In the footsteps of the first generation, these sociologists try to grasp how the conditions peculiar to high modern western societies have been resulting in the individualization of its members.

According to Beck, individualization (or 'the compulsion to lead a life of one's own and the possibility of doing it') is the effect of a social process of the disintegration of former social bonds on the one hand, and the

emergence of new guidelines and regulations that urge individuals to supply for themselves on the other. Characteristic of complex and highly differentiated western societies is the fact that the central institutions are geared to the individual and no longer to the group. This 'institutionalized individualism' has the paradoxical effect of people being forced to take their lives into their own hands (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). As there is a growing imbalance between the disembedded individual and global problems, the contemporary western individualizing society coerces it's members 'to seek biographical solutions to systemic contradictions' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: xxii).

In the same vein, Zygmunt Bauman (2001) focuses on the uncertainty, the liquidity, the smashing of present-day society as powerful individualizing forces. Flexibility of labor, volatility of capital, devaluation of order as such by globalization processes have become today's main techniques of domination. In such highly volatile societies people have no one but themselves to fall back on because mutual engagements and reciprocal dependencies no longer exist. It is up to the individual to find out what she will do with her life, her capacities and opportunities. The result of these individualizing social conditions is a society made up of individuals who no longer need leaders but counsellors, and in which the public space has been completely invaded by private issues (Bauman, 2000).

Giddens (1991, 1994) focuses on the reflexive nature of modernity as a main force in the individualization process. High modernity, as a post-traditional order, is characterized by a growing institutional reflexivity and an expansion of disembedding mechanisms. Disembedding mechanisms are those mechanisms which lift social interactions out from their local embeddedness and relocate them in an ever increasing time-space distantiation. Institutional reflexivity, according to Giddens, means that individuals and institutions have gradually been set free from the constraints of traditions and are forced to structure and restructure their activities in the light of expert knowledge. Such knowledges being divergent in their implications and frequently contested, remain therefore open to revision and even supplantation. This creates an atmosphere where people are continually confronted with multiple options that require decision-making. This modern process of individualization involves a 'setting free' of individuals, but at the same it implies that individuals must now actively work 'to resolve the question of how to live in a world of multiple options' (Giddens, 1991: 142).

What these sociologists have in common is their conception of the modern individual as the effect of the division of labour, the volatility of

society, institutional reflexivity and the ongoing process of de-traditionalization. However, so far, social theory has made little reference to the task of explaining how these social changes brought contemporary individuals into being. These theories mainly focus on large social developments, without demonstrating an understanding of how these developments impact at the level of the person in the production of the capacities peculiar to the autonomous individual.

In contrast to the sociologists mentioned previously, the personal level is a central area of interest in Norbert Elias' analysis of the emergence of the western individual. Elias shows in his main work, *The Civilizing Process* (1939), how the modern individual came into being as the result of changing power balances and interdependencies in the figuration of western societies. From the late Middle Ages onwards, when the balance of power was gradually turning towards the nobility and the courts, Elias witnessed long-term changes in bodily behaviour and the personality structure of human beings. As the courts became more complex and differentiated networks of interdependencies, its members were encouraged to monitor and control their own individual behaviour more closely. Heightened self-control required increased self-reflexivity, which in its turn caused people to perceive of themselves as individuals, separate from all others. After having emerged first of all in the courts, these new manners trickled down to lower social regions within society. Admittedly, the work of Elias is a rare example of sociological research which focuses extensively on personal behaviour and links changes in the personality structure to changes in the social structure.[1] However, in my opinion, Elias' theory cannot offer a full understanding of why changing behaviour and manners lead people to perceive of themselves as individuals. Elias does not pay sufficient attention to the meaning systems clustered around those new manners.

In my view, Michel Foucault offers more helpful tools to study individualization processes because he has focused more sharply on the concrete techniques by which human beings have been channelled into individuals. Foucault's work can be summarized as a genealogy of the modern western individual. As Foucault (1986) himself acknowledged, his work focused on three different modes by which human beings have been channelled into individuals. The first mode of individualization is the objectivizing effect of the sciences, or to be more precise: 'those inquiries which try to give themselves the status of sciences' (Foucault, 1986: 208). In *Les Mots et les Choses* he highlights the objectivizing effects on the speaking subject by general grammar, the objectivizing of the productive

and laboring subject in economics, and the objectivizing of the living essence of the subject in biology. A second mode which Foucault refers to is the individualizing effect of the modern technologies of disciplinary power. By optimizing the docility and usefulness of human bodies, disciplinary practices and their associated methods of examination, differentiating and quantifying function as a grid of individualization. And the third mode mentioned in his work is the process by which human beings turn themselves into individuals: technologies of the self are, according to Foucault (1988), the means by which human beings work upon their bodies, souls and conduct so as to constitute and reconstitute themselves. Other than the previously mentioned sociological approaches, Foucault's approach to the history of the modern individual is framed by local and internal terms, analysing specific practices and local discourses rather than global monolithic structures.

Nikolas Rose, drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, criticizes sociological individualization theories. According to Rose, individualization must not be seen as a consequence of fundamental transformations of human beings that take place 'elsewhere' in society. One cannot trace the history of individualization by deduction from some other, 'prior domain of reality' (Rose, 1996a: 305), be it gradual institutional reflexivity, flexibility of labor, or the differentiation of society. For Rose (1996a: 295, see also 1996b: 131): 'subjectivity has its own history, and it is a history that is more heterogeneous, more practical and more technical than these accounts suggest.' Adequate analysis has to focus on the way concrete techniques are used within mundane practices that try to regulate the behaviour of human beings in diverse and particular places. Nor can one conceive of western individualization processes as a history of ideas about the individual. In examining the construction of western individuals one must explore the multiple ways in which meaning systems, concepts and ideas of the individual have been translated into concrete practices and techniques for shaping the behaviour of human beings (Rose, 1996a: 298). Rose is much more sympathetic towards Elias' *Civilizing Process*, which according to him provides ample evidence of the heterogeneity of the historical processes of the formation of the self. However, Rose criticizes the circular reasoning underlying his theory. Elias reads changes in behaviour as an expression of transforming psychological structures. As such, Elias' interpretation itself rests upon a certain 'theory of the self', for it is precisely these notions of the self that need to be made intelligible if one is to understand the regimes by which human beings are transformed into individuals (Rose, 1996a: 305).

I disagree with Rose on his dismissal of mainstream sociological theories because they try to grasp western individualization processes by analysing changing 'external' conditions. I am not convinced that one can grasp western individualization processes adequately by defining individualization as a process in its own terms without any relationships with other social developments 'elsewhere' in society. I do agree with Rose in that these theories do not pay sufficient attention to the multiple ways in which these changing external conditions shape the everyday practices and techniques effectuating the construction of new individual identities. Since I want to explore the concrete modes in which modern consumer culture has fashioned women into individuals, I am particularly drawn to a Foucauldian approach to individualization.

However, what remains almost unaccounted for by Foucault, as well as by Rose, is the fact that the government of individuals has been the government of *gendered* individuals. It is striking how, even today (a few exceptions aside) the leading commentators on individualization have been debating the issue in nearly gender-blind terms. They refer to a gender-neutral 'individual', whereas a more gender-specific approach to individualization is needed for several reasons. First, the modern self is above all a gendered self. It has been argued many times that within the modern era gender has become one of the most essential features of personal identity (see Jordonova, 1989; Laqueur, 1990). Moreover, as feminist critics have pointed out, theories that are assumed to pertain to all human beings often turn out to be theories about 'men'. Some feminist scholars have therefore criticized the mainstream debates about individualization for neglecting the history of women. Women's lives were not accounted for within mainstream individualization theories. Redressing the imbalance, feminist scholars have explored the place of women in the development of our modern societies and argued that they have been excluded from the western development of individualization. Although this view tries to do justice to a gendered approach, it addresses only half of the problem. In my opinion, it fails to convey the specific 'feminine' ways in which women have been transformed into 'individuals'. In this article I will maintain the view that while being banned by 'masculine' logics of individualization, women have at the same time been subjected in many ways by 'other' – and indeed often trivialized – logics of individualization.[2]

In her book *Feminism without Illusions*, the historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (1991) deals with the emergence of individualism in western societies in relation to women's history. According to Fox-Genovese, the 18th-century revolutions – primarily the French – placed individualism at

the heart of western culture. In those revolutions the modern idea took shape that individual sovereignty constituted the necessary foundation of political and social order. But very soon it became clear, according to Fox-Genovese, that the men who had resolutely claimed individualism for themselves did not intend to extend the privilege to other segments of humankind. Women, children, slaves and white men of insufficient property were excluded from the political discourse of individualism. Theorists in the 18th century did not think of women as subjects of their new discourse of individualism (Fox-Genovese, 1991). However, even though political individualism was not open to women, it did not leave them untouched. Feminism as an ideology developed out of the doctrines of individualism and of individual rights and cannot be understood apart from them. Individualism as a doctrine made it possible, for at least some women, to conceive of themselves as individuals with the same rights as men. Thus, Fox-Genovese focuses on the history of women mainly as a history of their exclusion from the political institutions of individualism and of their struggle for rightful inclusion.

A similar logic can be found in the work of the sociologist Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1986). In her view women were excluded from the individualization process to which men had access. As she argues:

> . . . at the beginning of modernity individualization was restricted to men . . . Typical for the course of the modernization process is that the standard biography of men and women evolved in completely different directions. In the 19th century women's lives were not enlarged, in contrast they were confined to the inner space of the private realm . . . At the beginning of modernization, liberation from traditional social forms was restricted to men. At the end of the 19th century, first, this liberation became available to women, and only really from the sixties of this century. (Beck-Gernsheim, 1986: 219–20, translation my own)

From the 1960s onwards, when girls gained access to higher education on a large scale, and women gradually began to participate in the labor market, the female biography underwent an 'individualization boost', according to Beck-Gernsheim.

It is not my aim to disapprove of this view on the individualizing history of women. One cannot deny, of course, the exclusionary mechanisms towards women and the efforts made by women for equal individual rights. My concern is rather to extend the history of female

individualization and to underline the multifarious processes within which women were caught. Women's history has been more than a fight against exclusion from the male individualization process. In trying to construct a genealogy of the western processes of individualization, I think researchers have been too reluctant to move beyond the confines of the concept of individualism as it was first defined in the mid-19th century. According to Swart (1962), from the very beginning, the word individualism was used to designate three different clusters of ideas: the doctrine of political liberalism, economic liberalism, and Romantic individualism. However, this 19th-century focus on the male domains of politics, economy and the arts, must not prevent us from seeing that other more mundane domains were permeated as well by what Nikolas Rose (1996c: 3) calls a 'regime of the self'. Therefore, individualization practices or technologies have been proliferating within more social arenas than we have been aware of so far. Looking for 'other' specific feminine logics of individualization, I focus on that part of the mundane world called consumption culture.

CONSUMPTION CULTURE AND FEMALE INDIVIDUALIZATION

Consumption was not considered a worthy object of scientific research until a few decades ago, but since then an impressive body of knowledge has been produced. However, notwithstanding its connotations as a feminized and trivialized social domain, mainstream disciplines have paid scant attention to the gendered character and gender consequences of the emerging consumption culture. 'The consumer' has been conceived of as a general and de-sexualized human being. However, thanks to feminist scholarship, attention has been paid to the development of consumer culture in relation to gender politics. Unfortunately, one cannot yet speak of a systematic dialogue between the two approaches.

In recent years feminist historical analysis has convincingly shown how the cultural construction of the modern female subject occurred in relation to the emerging consumer culture. The cultural construction of women as consumers has been an essential aspect of the emerging definition of modern femininity. Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace (1997: 157) was right when she argued: 'In the end there is no western understanding of femininity that is not already embedded in the discourses of consumerism.' In this article I will emphasize the point of view that the cultural construction of women as consumers has contributed in a substantial way to the individualization of female identity.

The periodical press and women's magazines in particular played a decisive role in the development of consumption culture. In addition, they

were an important link in the making and disseminating of a modern discourse of the female consumer and of womanhood in general. Therefore, I will analyse fashion discourse in Dutch women's magazines from 1880 till 1920. In that period, the foundations were laid for what would become a 'modern' mass consumption culture in the Netherlands. The analysis is based upon the material presented in two popular Dutch women's magazines, named *The Graceful Woman* (*De Gracieuse*) and *Women's World* (*De Vrouwen-Wereld*). *The Graceful Woman* was exclusively devoted to fashion and was enormously popular at the time. When *The Graceful Woman* was launched in 1864 it had a circulation of 4000 copies; in 1904 the number had increased to 22,000 copies (Hemels and Vegt, 1993: 198). It appeared as a Dutch edition of the well-known German fashion magazine *Der Bazar* and was edited by three females (Hemels and Vegt, 1993: 199, see also Jensen, 2001: 229). While *The Graceful Woman* was probably not the best-selling fashion magazine, it has nevertheless been valued as a leading fashion magazine in the Netherlands (Ghering van Ierlant, 1988: 89).[3] In contrast to *The Graceful Woman*, which has been the subject of several historical investigations, not much is known about *Women's World*. As the magazine did not publish its circulation numbers, we can only make rough estimates as to its status in this regard. Its relative longevity (1888–1917, approx.) allows us to assume that this magazine must also have been popular. From the price (*Women's World* was less than half the price of *The Graceful Woman*), and the content (*Women's World* contained no fashion creations for women to be presented at the royal court), one can deduce that this magazine was aimed at a lower part of the bourgeoisie than *The Graceful Woman*, and might therefore have had a wider circulation. Nevertheless, both magazines represented fashionable women whose lives were composed of tea parties, afternoon walks, dinners, theatre visits, balls and soirees.

Women's World contained more than fashion alone: it also contained recipes, household hints, advice on health and childcare and discussions of family budgets. Moreover, a substantial part of its content was given over to fiction. In both magazines descriptions of clothes were accompanied by fashion plates and paper patterns. In both magazines, the front page was dedicated to an editorial on fashion. Those editorials form the main part of the material under scrutiny.

The editorials are considered as important 'sense-making practices' or as articulations, which in their structured totality constitute fashion discourse. A discourse is understood as a set of statements that temporarily fix meaning within a particular domain.[4] Fashion discourse, then, is

defined as a unified system of meaning pertaining to fashion. Discourse analytical techniques are used to grasp how fashion discourse in the period under scrutiny shaped a unified system of meaning (Fairclough, 1995; Philips and Jørgenson, 2002). Reading the editorials I tried to chart which signs have a privileged status and how they related to other signs in the discourse. I also looked at linguistic features (grammatical structures, metaphors etc.) which cast light on the ways that texts construct specific versions of social identities and social relations. Moreover, the analysis will focus on how the authors of the texts drew on already existing discourses to create new ones. In order to allow the reader to judge my interpretation of these meaning-making articulations, I offer some representative extracts from the empirical material under scrutiny.

FASHION DISCOURSE AND THE GOVERNMENT OF FEMALE INDIVIDUALITY

An examination of *The Graceful Woman* and *Women's World* shows us how fashion discourse contributed to the construction and reproduction of modern bourgeois womanhood. The magazines contained long pages of descriptions of clothes and some illustrations. The magazines almost exclusively contained representations of fashionable clothes worn by women. If in a rare case male garments were offered, then only the clothes were represented, not the clothes as worn by men. These different representations are at once product and cause of our western culture localizing women in their bodies. Men, by contrast, stand above every form of bodily positioning. As the cultural theorist Marjorie Garber (1992: 372) argued, man cannot be embodied, embodiment itself is a form of feminization and displacement of masculinity. So fashion magazines were spreading the message that fashionable dress is peculiar to womanhood and that women are much more bodily beings than are men. Judith Butler's notion of performativity stresses the process by which gender is the result of acquiring the correct dress styles, body posture and demeanor rather than gender being an essential quality of the body. According to Butler:

> . . . gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (Butler, 1990: 270)

Moreover, the representations in both magazines make clear that the stylized acts do not only refer to femininity but to bourgeois femininity. Women were represented while participating in tea parties, afternoon walks, dinners,

theatre visits and balls, all of course dressed for the occasion. As Thorstein Veblen (1899) pointed out in his now classic *Theory of the Leisure Class*, conspicuous consumption was a key element of bourgeois femininity. Within the newly emerging bourgeoisie, it was men's role to produce. The main occupation of women was to express their husband's pecuniary position. Especially, women's dress, which made them obviously incapable of work, was an important means by which the bourgeois class could show off.

However, when reading the fashion magazines *The Graceful Woman* and *Women's World* we discover the elements of another logic. If the images were rather unambiguous in their representation of female bourgeois lifestyle, the accompanying texts contained few explicit evocations of class positions. At that time the use of fashion, as an expression of class consciousness, was apparently still self-evident. However, a new emerging logic was being pronounced. The texts articulated a cluster of norms and values referring to different conceptions of the individual. Individual autonomy, free choice, self-awareness, originality and individual harmony are the central concepts which were scattered all through the magazines and which were systematically addressed to the female readers. Especially at the beginning of the research period, these concepts were systematically related to the contemporary social era characterized by increasing freedom. It is striking how in those days editors repeatedly harped on the acquired freedom in fashion behaviour. According to the editors, freedom opened up not only the possibility, but also the necessity, for personal choice:

> Complaints are voiced about the growing confusion in our ideas, about the need of freedom in every domain, even fashion can not pride itself on being orderly, but far from considering this fact regrettable, we believe it will be conceived by most as a great privilege . . . This confusion demands good judgement and profound insight to be able to make an appropriate choice and to do justice to the requirements of good taste and thrift. (*Women's World*, 1893 nr. 8)

The situation of freedom and choice was said to be the result on the one hand, of an explosion of goods on the market, and on the other hand, of the abolition of sumptuary legislation and of loosening social traditions. In the following two extracts one can see how the editors were teaching their readers that one's clothing behaviour was no longer to be determined by official dress rules or by traditional practices. The old traditions and rules

had given way to the new capacities of choosing according to one's own personal taste:

> Thanks to the many-sidedness of the offered forms it can be a great relief that one does not submit anymore to the official dress rules, but that one can choose according to one's own taste. (*Women's World*, 1893 nr. 7)

> In our fast living time one can no longer require of those beauty garments that they remain saved for future generations. Instead they are chosen by every change of fashion and it must be left to the survivors to follow their own inclinations. (*The Graceful Woman*, 1895 nr. 5)

In this era of freedom and choice, confusion and chaos, the editors set themselves up as the arbiters of taste and consumption practices. In their editorial columns, the editors presented themselves explicitly as the guides and judges of female appearance. In an editorial letter to their readers, on the occasion of an enlargement of the magazine, we read the following:

> We, from our side, continue to do on a broader scale what has already been our task for three years, i.e. to guide women in the sensible and nevertheless pretty adornment of their persons . . . (*Women's World*, 1890 nr. 1)

From this extract we can see that the editors were presenting the magazine itself as a sort of 'conduct manual' to feminine appearance, and that they advised their readers to be 'sensible' in their use of ornament and fashion. In several instances they castigated extravagance and exaggeration. In these fashion magazines, which were advocating the importance of feminine outward appearance, the definition of female beauty was not monolithic. The Dutch *The Women's World* and *The Graceful Woman*, just as their British counterparts, are characterized by tension between the equation of femininity with outward beauty on the one hand and 'the domestic ideal of the maternal woman whose beauty was inner and spiritual' on the other (see Ballaster et al., 1991: 85). External beauty was exalted, yet fashionable adornment had to fit into what Erin Mackie (1997: 14) calls 'the bourgeois stylistic regime', which is characterized by reticence and modesty, and in which legitimacy and strength reside on the 'inside' as opposed to the (merely superficial) 'outside'.

Of more importance to the issue of individualization is the way the fashion editors informed their readers as to how choices should be made;

as to how freedom had to be dealt with. According to the editors, the new freedom had to be mastered by an active agency on behalf of the female consumers themselves. The women were said to have been left to their own devices, and as such were solicited to regulate their 'choices' with the help of some guidelines.

Deciphering the editorials, three regulative principles, based upon specific concepts of the individual, can be seen as emerging in varying combinations and sequences. First, each individual woman had to come to bear responsibility for her own fashion practices. Women could no longer follow fashion rules uncritically. The fashion industry could set out a framework within which women might operate, but no more. This regulative principle is based upon the notion of the autonomous and self-deciding individual. Closely linked to this first principle, a second principle was disseminated: women had to learn to develop their own personal style and good taste. Values such as originality, singularity and artistic taste were heralded as important characteristics of personal style. Finally, women had to learn to see themselves as their own references. Fashion dictates could not be followed without respect for the individual. In contrast, women were taught to evaluate fashion rules critically and to adapt them to their own specific body potentialities and individual make-up. Personal harmony and authenticity are the main values underlying this third principle.

In the following quotations we can see how these three regulative principles form an important horizon against which modern women had to learn to understand themselves:

> How do we dress ourselves?
>
> According to the old proverb 'a fine gentlemen is easily distinguished by the cut of his coat'. But clothes alone cannot complete the outward appearance of a woman.
>
> Neither colour, nor form, nor the style of the dress, nor the richness of it, not even the blind compliance with the latest prescription of fashion, can have a decisive influence. Only harmony with the figure, colour, the specificities of the personality can carry the grace, the charm and the elegance of dress, which grant to many women such a magic power.
>
> Many daughters of Eve find the secret of dressing well by instinct; others study it and, unfortunately!, for not a few of them, the puzzle remains unsolved. Nevertheless some attentiveness, a little reflection and study can help a woman to

> acquire a talent for good clothing choices and compositions in no time at all.
>
> One size does not fit all. This rule holds as a maxim in the art of dressing oneself and especially when choosing the color of one's clothes. (*Women's World*, 1891 nr. 16)

In this extract, the gender subtext is conspicuous. The text opens with the proverb 'A fine gentleman is easily distinguished by the cut of his coat.' Without any comments, as an absolute matter of course, the editors associate fashion with femininity. The art of dressing well is 'naturalized' as an instinctual characteristic of ideal femininity. However, many women have to work hard to obtain the skill of dressing charmfully. These statements are in line with the argument made by Ballaster et al. (1991: 14) that the paradox of 'natural' femininity being obtained only through hard work was part of the ideological core of women's magazines. Furthermore, this text can be read as an articulation of the above mentioned three ideas: first, women must not follow fashion blindly but must take responsibility for nurturing their talent for good taste; second, women must adjust fashion to their own individual make-up; and third and last, women must cultivate the uniqueness of their personality.

The next extract starts with a reference to the new social conditions of rapidly expanding consumer markets. It proceeds, once more, by focussing on the regulative principles mentioned earlier. The values of autonomy and personal harmony are particularly foregrounded here:

> We are nowadays showered with such a rich multiplicity of forms, fabrics and colours that it becomes a problem of the utmost difficulty and complexity to choose an appropriate and smart wardrobe for the next season. In addition, what suits the one, is unsuitable for the other, and many dresses that catch the eye initially wind up disappointing the wearer because they do not suit her figure. The supreme art is to ensure that one's dress is, in every respect, in harmony with oneself. One must take carefully considered decisions in matters of cut, fabric and color, such that all of one's clothing highlights one's figure and personality to the best advantage. (*The Graceful Woman*, 1892 nr. 2)

From this and the previous fragments, one can see how fashion editors persistently reiterated different values and concepts referring to the individual. By doing so they created a language by means of which women had to learn to understand themselves as autonomous, free-choosing

consumers, aware of themselves and their unique outward appearance. Free choice, individual make-up, personal harmony, unique personality and individual taste were central categories with the help of which women had to learn to see themselves and to legitimate their consumption practices. Female consumers were educated and solicited to act out their own taste and to choose in the name of their individuality. These specific ways of addressing women and channelling them into being unique individuals may be called, after Michel Foucault, techniques of individuality.

However, as one could have noticed, fashion discourse was not a single unified meaning system. While teaching their readers the latest fashion dictates, the editors of *The Graceful Woman* and *Women's World* exhorted them to exercise 'free' and 'independent choice'. Editors of these magazines proceeded in a dual and paradoxical manner: they invited their readers to follow the latest fashion, and also encouraged them to behave as self-defining women. They offered concrete advice while at the same time stimulating personal taste. In this way, fashion discourse was riddled with tensions between the validation of fashion and the dissemination of a language of free choice, between the clear and directing voice of the editor and the discourse of self-determination. But notwithstanding these inconsistencies, fashion discourse was presenting a clear ideal: that of the autonomous consumer aware of herself and of her fashionable appearance. Through tenacious use of concepts such as freedom and choice, personal taste, personal make-up and individual harmony, the journals articulated norms and principles for shaping female experience and recognition of individual selves as the locus of choice and responsibility.

The editorials examined thus far show us how incorporation into consumer culture was to be reached through the production of the deliberate collaboration of consumers. Consumer habits and attitudes were instituted not through compulsion but through 'appealing'. Fashion choices were taught to be understood as freely adopted and experienced as individual ones. In her examination of fashion in the papers *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, Erin Mackie (1997: 21) argues that bourgeois discourse of taste is characteristic of 'the large historic shift from the absolutist to hegemonic modes of socio-political control'. Hegemonic power governs through the logic of persuasion and identification, not through formal modes of social regulation and control:

> People revise their own behavior and lifestyles not under the duress of sumptuary law or formal edict – religious or secular – but propelled by desires felt as individual and personal, truly's

> own. Such wants and satisfactions go far to constitute the deepest sense of self. (Mackie, 1997: 21)

In the same vein, Nikolas Rose argues that power in liberal democratic societies is enacted not by the imposition of conduct through legislation or coercive intervention but through techniques of government rooted in a rationale of freedom. These techniques are directed primarily towards the supporting of individuals in defining and achieving their own objectives. According to Rose:

> The forms of freedom we inhabit today are intrinsically bound to a regime of subjectification in which subjects are not merely 'free to choose', but obliged to be free, to understand and enact their lives in terms of choice under conditions that systematically limit the capacities of so many to shape their own destiny (Rose, 1996c: 17)

As we can see, the realm of consumption has been a site *par excellence* for the subjectification of women into consumers 'free to choose' while at the same time choices have been systematically socially generated and delimited by fashion dictates.

TECHNIQUES OF THE SELF

Being a sovereign self of choice and being true towards oneself means that one has to know oneself. The government of autonomous and freely choosing consumers goes hand in hand with the promotion and education of specific forms of self-inspection and self-evaluation. Technologies of the government of others exist in a kind of symbiotic relationship with 'techniques of the self' (Rose, 1990: 10) defined by Foucault (1988: 18) as instruments 'which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality'.

In turn-of-the-century fashion magazines women were kindly asked to scrutinize themselves carefully, and were offered guidelines for evaluating and judging themselves. Female consumers had to adjust their fashion practices by means of the criteria propounded by the experts of appearance. In the following examples, we will see how women were informed about the means to encourage self-knowledge and to accommodate their fashion practices accordingly. The examples are fragments of a series of two

articles called 'The Art of Dressing' which appeared in *Women's World*. The first quotation is a fragment of the article subtitled 'color':

> Because of the great freedom that reigns in fashion nowadays, women are required to show a much higher degree of originality and good taste than in former days when dozens of women were dressed by seamstresses after a single model.
>
> Every woman must buckle down to discover, scrutinizing herself carefully, a way of dressing that shows her personality to great advantage and that confers a singular stamp upon it. (*Women's World*, 1888 nr. 13)

Here we see once more the norm propounded of dressing in an 'original' way, of enhancing one's own personality. Such a way of dressing, it is said, needs self-scrutiny. The article continues with an elaborate account of how to inspect oneself carefully as to the color of one's hair, one's skin, and one's eyes. Subsequently it offered detailed information about which colour of dress should be combined with what kind of hair, skin and eyes.

The second article is about dress form and again it invited women readers to make a study and an evaluation of their own body forms:

> 'Know Thyself', said a famous Greek philosopher and the fair sex is well advised to gather knowledge if not of their inner than at least of their outer 'selves'. Mockers of all centuries have laughed at women and their mirrors. Let it then be given to the nineteenth century daughtership to prove that time spent on self-scrutiny is not lost.
>
> 'Know thyself'
>
> Therefore she, who will make a study of the art of dressing, must place herself before the mirror and consider her personality seriously. Height, breath, dimensions, size of the waist, size of the feet, form of the shoulder, length of the neck and position of the head, everything must be considered with care. *(Women's World*, 1888 nr. 14)

As one can readily see, the article starts with a citation of an already existing proverb. By using the proverb in another context the editors are transforming its meaning. Within everyday usage, the expression 'know yourself' refers to the importance of being conscious of one's own capabilities, potentials and shortcomings to behave and act in a sensible way.

Placed in the context of fashion, the self-knowledge to be gathered consists of information about one's bodily make-up. Furthermore, the editors are manifestly countering the cultural disapproval of women wasting their time looking into a mirror. The importance of scrutinizing the personal make-up is underlined by repeating the proverb a second time. Moreover, by linking the act of scrutinizing to the 'art' of dressing it becomes even more valued. In what follows, the editors explain extensively which bodily parts must be inspected. In addition, the article offers rules on the selection of good models and fabrics according to one's particular body shape.

Scattered throughout the texts, the editors provide different sorts of techniques by means of which female consumers would be able to examine and judge themselves. The extracted texts show us how these techniques of the self have stimulated women in thinking and acting on the bodily self; in developing body consciousness and awareness of themselves as embodied individuals. Thus, this analysis highlights the thoroughly social character of the modern experience of the body as an expression of the self. The way women experience themselves as embodied individuals is the product of discursive practices made up of different bodily techniques. Moreover, this analysis shows us once more that in modern consumption culture the self-understanding of women as individuals is firmly based in bodily experiences of the self.

Until some decades ago, many sociologies and histories of fashion were written without taking bodily aspects into account. From the 1980s onwards, a real upsurge of scientific interest in the body has occurred.[5] Against this background of heightened scientific interest in the body, fashion theory has increasingly focused on dress behaviour as an embodied cultural practice. The work of Joanne Entwistle is an interesting example of the recent approach that explicitly focuses on the bodily effects of fashion. She emphasizes the social nature of the body by defining dress as a situated bodily practice which is embedded within the social world (Entwistle, 2000: 11, 2001: 34). However, the theoretical framework she developed to account for fashion, as a situated embodied practice is fundamentally ambivalent. This ambiguity relates to the fact that in her theoretical framework she is reproducing one of the central problems of the social sciences, namely the conceptualization of the individual and the social as separated entities.[6] Entwistle is right in arguing that an account of dress as an embodied situated practice involves an understanding of the structural determinants as well as the actual experiences of dress practices. However, in Entwistle's framework this means the equation of the

structuredness of dress practices with the social and the experiential dimension of the embodiment with the non-social or the individual as pre-given. In my view the experiential, the intimate or the individual self should not be separated from the social: it is a thoroughly social product. Entwistle concludes her chapter 'Fashion and Identity':

> In our contemporary culture the body has become the site of identity. We experience our bodies as separate from others and increasingly we identify with our bodies as containers of our identities and places of personal expressions. (Entwistle, 2000: 39)

Although Entwistle situates this experience in 'our contemporary culture', the status of this utterance is unclear considering her dualistic vision on the social and the individual. Therefore, my express aim is to emphasize the thoroughly social nature and the cultural and historical specificity of this bodily experience. It is the situated effect of the 'modern' linking of bodily appearance and female individual identity. My own analysis explores how, with the help of various individualizing techniques and techniques of the self, this way of seeing and experiencing the modern female body has come into being.

Moreover, I underline the gendered character of this bodily experience. Although Foucault offers a theoretical account of the ways modern disciplinary power produces docile and normalized bodies, he never examines the implications of his work in gendered terms. Many feminist scholars have criticized Foucault for his inattention to gender, but many others have used Foucauldian tools to investigate those gendered disciplines that have produced feminine bodies (McLaren, 2002). It will come as no surprise that fashion, dieting and slimming practices have been pointed at many times as important technologies disciplining and normalizing the female body (see Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1993; Craick, 1994). While Sandra Lee Bartky reads these disciplinary practices in terms of female oppression and subordination, in this article I have tried to focus on how the gendered bodily techniques relating to fashion and ornamentation have acted as catalysts with regard to the production of female individualization. In recent years, mainstream social theorists have argued that in the postmodern consumer society a new relationship between body and self has developed. Bodily appearance has become an important aspect of the individual's identity project (Featherstone, 1991; Giddens, 1991). My analysis of 19th-century fashion magazines has shown that this way of perceiving the body is by no means new. Techniques which link bodily

make-up with the individual self are thoroughly modern disciplining instruments.

ARTS AND THE EXPRESSIVE SELF

Fashion editors in *Women's World* and *The Graceful Woman* did not provide their readers with a coherent single-voiced narrative about the individual. The multiple notions of the individual used by the editors to create a new discourse stem from various resources which were more or less dominant in the 19th century. In the two previous sections, we could discern the central function of notions such as 'freedom to choose' and 'individual choice' in fashion discourse. These notions are the more mundane or popular equivalents of the concept of consumer sovereignty, which is a central idea within the tradition of liberalism. According to Slater (1997: 38), this liberal idea of the sovereign consumer is derived itself from the broader Enlightenment ideal of modern man as a self-defining man. However, while liberalism was speaking in terms of universal rights, it nonetheless excluded groups such as women, children and subordinate males. Its definition of the consumer as a rational, autonomous 'hero' was restricted to men (Slater, 1997: 33). Female consumers, in contrast, were seen from the 18th century onwards as passive, impulsive and voracious (Felski, 1995: 61; Kowaleski-Wallace, 1997: 5), and although liberalism did exclude women from its definition of the sovereign consumer, this notion did not leave them untouched. Women were explicitly addressed by liberal (male) concepts refracted within the more mundane fashion discourse. The editors of *The Graceful Woman* and *Women's World* were inviting their readers, through a discourse of 'free' and 'independent choice', to consume in a sensible way. Women were encouraged to conceive of themselves as autonomous consumers for whom fashion, as a social institution, could only be legitimate when adapted to their own self-developed style.

Along with liberalism, Romanticism has also been an important supplier of notions of the individual. The guidelines by means of which women were taught to exercise their freedom also made use of Romantic notions such as the authentic, the unique and the original. Moreover, in the previously mentioned editorial extracts, one can see how, time and again, references are made to the arts and artists in fashion discourse. In *The Graceful Woman* and *Women's World* fashion editors frequently drew analogies between fashion and the arts. The editors spoke about 'the art of dressing oneself', the work of the 'modistes' was called 'art', and the 'modistes' themselves were defined as 'artists'. This is also the case in the

following extract, where the fashion editor of *Women's World* allowed a female artist to speak about her stance on fashion:

> 'Fashion never changes for me except when it pleases me', said a well known female artist recently, 'and this is so for the good reason that I invent it myself'. That she succeeded herein is proven by her choice of costume. (*Women's World*, 1888 nr. 14)

This sentence, whether real or fabricated for journalistic purposes, is an outstanding example of an individualistic ethic. The female artist sees herself as the only locus of choice and decision in fashion matters. The artist recognizes herself as a self-determining subject. These numerous references to the arts were, of course, no coincidence. Since 19th-century Romanticism the arts have been seen as the locus *par excellence* of self-expression and originality; the artist as the personification of individuality and authenticity. According to Colin Campbell (1983, 1987), the principles of originality and self-expression and the references to art and artists are constituent elements of the Romantic ethic, a doctrine that enabled the development of a modern dynamic consumer behaviour. In particular, the Romantic conception of the individual played a key role in engendering a desire for ever-changing, new and different things. This conception emphasized the uniqueness of every individual and his/her duty to develop and express that uniqueness by means of consumer practices. So, the dissemination of Romantic doctrines with their specific conceptions of the individual provided a pervasive set of motivations and justifications for the development of consumer behaviour (Campbell, 1987: 200). However, the fact that the modern consumer was a woman in the first place has been completely glossed over by Campbell. Investigation of the fashion magazines has taught us indeed how fashion has been riddled with Romantic notions of the individual. Terms such as originality, authenticity and personal harmony were percolating all around. The two former paragraphs have explored how these notions have been translated into concrete techniques of individuality or techniques of the self.

However, what strikes me most is the fact that both the fashion discourse diffused by the channels of 'Parisian' fashion and the discourse propagated by the dress reform movement, drew on the same Romantic conceptions of the authentic and expressive individual to justify dress practices. In contrast to one's expectations, mainstream fashion and the opposition movement were collaborators in the spreading of Romantic ideals about the expressive self. The Dutch Association for Feminine Dress Reform (Nederlandse vereeniging voor verbeterde vrouwenkleeding) was

founded in 1899. It had come into being as a result of the National Exhibition of Women's Labour, which had been held in 1898 in The Hague. A substantial part of the exhibition was devoted to dress reform. After this, forces rallied to found the Dutch Dress Reform Association (Schnitger, 1985). The founding of this Association was, of course, not an isolated event. It was embedded in a more general movement towards dress reform in western European countries and in the USA. The main goal of the dress reform movement was to devote itself to more practical, healthy and comfortable clothing. The movement ardently opposed the corset and excessively heavy ornamentations (Newton, 1974; Wilson, 1985). These things were said to ruin the health, induce consumption and cause the development of an immoral and unnatural erotic sensibility. The pursuit of a new female costume emerged in the first place out of the need for healthy dress. In most countries, however, artists tried to design the reform clothes according to new aesthetic norms. The basic principles of the dress reform movement, which defined fashion as a debased practice, were that the new female costume should not titillate the senses, it should radiate an eternal beauty, and the personality of the wearer must not be obscured by the clothes but, in contrast, it must be sustained and underlined. This goal has been seen by the movement as a 'high minded' ideal running counter to the governing principles of Parisian fashion (Schnitger, 1985: 163).

The following extract shows how the discourse of the dress reform movement was composed of different principles: practical, aesthetic as well as notions of the expressive individual. The abstract is part of a column about dress reform that was a regular feature in the periodical *Women's Labour* (*Vrouwenarbeid*), the organ of the National Exhibition:

> I sincerely hope that [the dress reform movement] will bring to all everything that is needed and wished for: a dress of grace to fresh youth, a dress of ease to maturity, a dress that will not hamper the industrious worker in any way . . . the right to be individual to all women, also in her clothing; and to the future generation the chance to represent, with their well developed bodies, the ideal of beauty described by the Greeks of old. If this movement contests hereby the silly prejudice that one should dress according to one's status in society, so be it, one's dress should deceive the world about one's fortune and position . . . and if it teaches us nothing else than seeing dress as a statement of individuality, then this movement, little as it seems, compared to movements with powerful interests, can

> work out well for women and humankind. (*Women's Labour*, 1898 nr.4)

The Romantic idea of expressing one's authentic individuality through dress was one of the central ideas of the dress reform movement. In legitimating its stance toward dress and fashion, the reform movement drew, to a large extent, on conceptions of the individual as advocated by Romanticism. However, as I explained earlier, Romanticism was also an important furnisher of ideas of mainstream fashion discourse. Although mainstream fashion and the reform movement were quite oppositional currents within modern consumer culture, their concomitant discourses were both pervasively influenced by the same Romantic conceptions of the individual. So, this analysis is in line with Don Slater's (1997: 16) argument that bourgeois consumerism, as well as its temporary 'critical' opponents, was informed considerably by Romanticism. While furnishing a language that was meant to critique the cultural deficits of modernity, Romanticism has been adapted by modern consumerism, which was seen as an important destructive force of culture (Slater, 1997: 97). So, contrary to the usual school of thought, the Romantic idea of an authentic expressive self and its concrete translations into techniques of the self were not only gaining currency within a few oppositional artistic and feminist circles, they were also disseminated by the channels of dominant fashion to a substantial number of women outside these 'elitist' groups. On a large scale, women were 'kindly requested' to articulate their personal taste and to develop their own original style in the name of their utmost individuality. The technologies of individuality haunted the realm of mainstream consumption every bit as much as it did the more critical social reform movements.

CONCLUSION

It was my aim in this article to demonstrate how the arena of fashion, as a component of consumption culture, has been an important site of female individualization. I have argued that women were not merely excluded from the western individualization processes, but have also been addressed by typical 'feminine' logics of individualization of which fashion discourse was one. By means of individualizing techniques, fashion discourse educated women as self-defining consumers, increasingly aware of themselves and their unique outward appearance. Fashion editors aimed at endowing women with the capacities to act as autonomous consumers within a framework they as fashion experts themselves had set out. The

readers were taught to justify their decisions about dress and style in terms of their personal taste and individual make-up. Every decision women made had to be seen and felt as the result of the exercise of their free and personal choice, regardless of how restrictive fashion directives might be.

So, if modern consumer society has been tying personal identity to fashionable images, it has mainly affected women. Rather than denigrating women for pursuing fashion as a major source of personal identification, or lamenting the harmful effects of fashion on individual identities as some feminist scholars do (see Finkelstein, 1991), one should try to improve the historical understanding of how these effects have come into being. It is only by revealing the historical contingency of this specific construction of female identity that one can start questioning and modifying it.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the Dutch National Research Council, which provided me with a grant for doing this research. I thank Francisca de Haan for her support from the earliest stages of this research. My thanks also go to Geert de Vries, George Ritzer and the anonymous referees for their comments on a previous version. I especially thank Sherill Rose for improving my English and Chunglin Kwa for his support.

Notes

1. Moreover, as Ian Burkitt (1991: 13–17) has argued, in contrast to the first generation of sociologists Elias offers a thoroughly sociological account of the individual. Social theorists such as Durkheim, Simmel, Marx and Weber tried to analyse in their theoretical work the modern individual as the product of social developments. In contrast, in their methodological statements, they conceive of the individual as something essential to human life and therefore as prior to society.
2. In developing this view I am indebted to Rita Felski's (1995) approach to modernity.
3. To assess the representativeness of *The Graceful Woman* I tried to compare its circulation at a certain point in time with the circulation of another fashion magazine at the same point in time. Unfortunately that information was not available. One point of comparison is a rather cheap family weekly magazine that reached a circulation of 32,000 copies in 1903, while *The Graceful Woman* reached 22,000 copies in 1904.
4. I draw on a definition from Ernesto Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, see Philips and Jørgensen (2002: 27).
5. For an overview of the recent upsurge of body theory, mainstream and feminist alike see Davis (1997).
6. The aim of Entwistle in developing her framework is to combine a structuralist with a phenomenological approach. However, in her framework she equates the structuredness of dress practices with the social and the experiential dimension of the embodiment with the non-social or the individual. I believe that this is the result of an uncritical use of the early theory of Merleau-Ponty, in which

the individual is conceptualized – notwithstanding the fact that it is seen as being situated in time and place – as a self which is anterior to language and culture.

In her book *The Fashioned Body* (2000) Entwistle stresses frequently that dress is both a social *and* an intimate activity (see pp. 11 and 35), thereby suggesting that a person's life is composed of a social and a separated intimate or individual realm. In the book *Dressed Body* (2001) she likewise argues:

> Dress lies at the margins of the body and marks the boundary between self and other, individual *and* society. This boundary is intimate and personal since our dress forms the visible envelope of the self . . . it is also the social since our dress is structured by social forces and subject to social and moral pressures. (p. 37; emphasis added)

From this fragment one can see once more how Entwistle differentiates the intimate/personal from the social. She conceptualizes the individual and society as two fundamentally separated entities. In my view the experiential, the intimate or the individual self should not be separated from the social: it is thoroughly social.

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